

Ministry of Justice

COVID-19 Stakeholder Update / 24.04.20

This is the Ministry of Justice's regular stakeholder communications update service. This is intended to signpost the latest COVID-19 guidance and central government updates.

We encourage organisations to share these updates with your wider networks to ensure a wide circulation of important communications. For monitoring and evaluation purposes, we'd gratefully receive information on who you are sharing this with.

We would also find it helpful to know about your own communications plans and any intel that will help inform our communications moving forwards. Please do get in touch at stakeholder.intel@justice.gov.uk.

- We have robust and flexible plans to ensure we can continue to deliver key services across the justice system.
- A network of priority courts will remain open during the coronavirus pandemic to make sure the justice system continues to operate effectively.
- Selected lower-risk offenders, within weeks of their release dates, and pregnant women in custody who do not pose a high risk of harm to the public will be temporarily released from prison. Additionally, works have begun to deliver 500 temporary, single occupancy units at seven jails. This will increase space in prisons and limit the spread of Coronavirus helping protect staff, prisoners and the NHS.

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NEW: COVID-19 testing extended to all essential workers and members of their households in England who have symptoms. This will include prisons, probation, courts and tribunals staff, the Judiciary, charities and workers delivering critical frontline services. Self-isolating workers can either book a test directly through a secure portal or be referred by their employer. Read the full guidance here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-getting-tested>

NEW: The Lord Chancellor has announced today that rules on hardship payments for legal practitioners will be amended in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The threshold for hardship payments will be reduced to £450, and applications will be able to be made one month after instruction for work done, providing relief for many more litigators and advocates. More information will be provided next week when the regulations come into force.

HMPPS

NEW: HMPPS has published an overview of the process and eligibility criteria for offenders to be released early under the ECTR scheme. The overview sets out which factors are taken into account when assessing a prisoner for early release and more detail on the process by which prisoners are assessed. Read the full guidance here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-prison-releases>

Prisons and probation services have implemented significant changes to comply with the Government's social distancing rules and to protect staff and service users. The service has been working closely with public health experts, as well as criminal justice partners, to ensure that robust contingency plans are in place and immediate action can be taken wherever cases are identified. The following page will continue to be updated when new advice is available: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-and-prisons>

As of 17:00 on THURSDAY 23 APRIL:

- 304 prisoners have tested positive for COVID-19 across 69 prisons;
- 257 prison staff have tested positive for COVID-19 across 59 prisons;
- 10 Prisoner Escort and Custody Services (PECS) staff have tested positive for COVID-19.

Further updates with the latest figures may be released later this evening to the media and will be included here the following day for information, so please do bear with us if they are superseded during the day.

HMCTS

During this unprecedented public health emergency, we are adjusting practices and taking steps to minimise the risk to the judiciary, court staff and users. Any changes to individual hearings will be communicated directly to those affected in the usual way, by email and/or phone. The following page will continue to be updated when new advice is available: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-courts-and-tribunals-planning-and-preparation>

Judiciary

NEW: Update on jury trials. A judicial working group has been established to consider ways to re-start some jury trials once it is safe to do so. The working group will report to the Lord Chief Justice through its chair Mr Justice Edis. It includes representatives from the Law Society, Bar Council, Criminal Bar Association, HMCTS, CPS, PECS, MoJ, HMPPS, NPS, NPCC, and Legal Aid Agency: <https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/jury-trials/>

Latest general guidance

- Guidance for those involved in managing COVID-19 deaths: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-those-involved-in-managing-covid-19-deaths>
- Guidance on the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>
- The Business Support campaign for COVID-19: <https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support/>
- Guidance on protecting vulnerable people from COVID-19: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>
- Home isolation / 'stay at home' guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance>
- Guidance on social distancing: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people>

Please continue to refer to [GOV.UK/coronavirus](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus) for the latest information on the situation in the UK and the Government's response. For information about the illness and symptoms visit [nhs.uk/coronavirus](https://www.nhs.uk/coronavirus)